

Michigan Woman Faces 93 Days in Jail for Planting a Vegetable Garden

by Colleen Vanderlinden on 07. 8.11



Photo Credit: Julie Bass

UPDATE: Charges have been dropped by the city of Oak Park. See the end of this post for details.

It just doesn't get more ridiculous than this.

Julie Bass of Oak Park, Michigan -- a mother of 6, law-abiding citizen, and gardener -- is facing 93 days in jail after being charged with a misdemeanor.

Her crime? Planting a vegetable garden in the front yard.

Bass says that she planted the garden after her front yard was torn up for some sewer repairs. Rather than wasting the opportunity to start with a clean slate by planting a lawn, she decided to really put the area to use, and plant a vegetable garden.

Her garden consists of 5 raised beds, where she grows a mix of squashes, corn, tomatoes, flowers, and other veggies. Bass received a warning from the city telling her to remove the vegetable garden, because it doesn't adhere to city ordinances (more on that later.) When she refused, she was ticketed and charged with a misdemeanor. Her trial, before a jury, is set to begin on July 26th. If she is found guilty, she can be sentenced to up to 93 days in jail.

About the City Ordinance

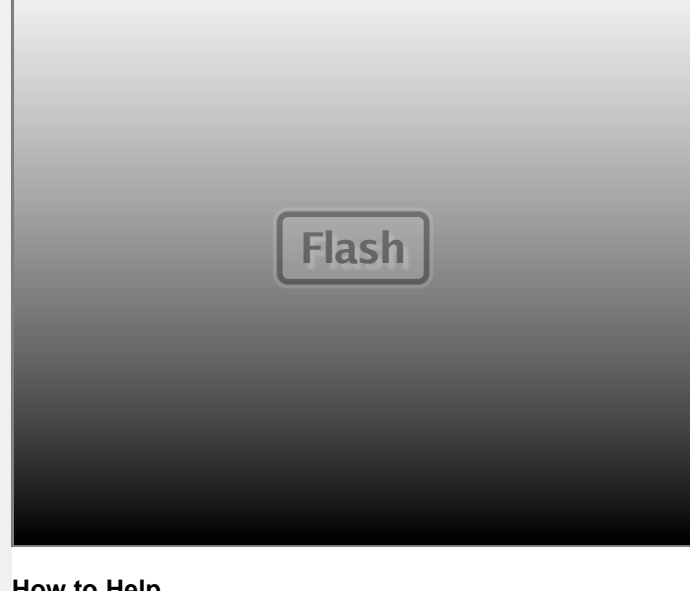
Supposedly, Bass is in noncompliance with a city ordinance that states that only "suitable" plant material is allowed on the lawn area of residences. When local media asked city planner Kevin Rulkowski what that meant, he said suitable means "common:" lawn, nice shrubs, and flowers. However, the city ordinance does not specifically state that those are the only allowed plant materials.

About Oak Park

This is not some gated community with HOA regulations. This is an ordinary, working class neighborhood in Oakland County, Michigan. Like nearly every other city in my home state right now, Oak Park is facing financial issues. Here at home, people are amazed that a cash-strapped city has the resources to investigate, charge, and prosecute a resident for something as innocuous as planting a vegetable garden.

What's Being Done

This story is gaining traction all over the web. [Gawker covered it this morning](#). There are Facebook pages devoted to supporting Mrs. Bass and her family during this ordeal. Will social media help change the city's mind? That's what many of us are hoping. Local television affiliates for ABC and Fox news have already covered the story, and media attention continues to grow.



How to Help

If you want to help support a gardener's right to grow food for her family (even if it is -- gasp -- in the front yard!) there are several things you can do:

1. Email or call officials for the city of Oak Park. Mrs. Bass has [listed contact information for the mayor, city manager, and other city officials in the sidebar of her blog](#).
2. "Like" the [Oak Park Hates Veggies Facebook Page](#).
3. Spread the word via Facebook and Twitter. By gaining attention to this particular issue, with this particular homeowner, the hope is that other cities will reconsider before they harass another homeowner for something like this.

What do you think? Should a front yard vegetable garden be a crime?

UPDATES:

Since covering this story, we've added more coverage about front yard veggie gardens and gardener's rights. Here are more stories that might interest you:

- [Front Yard Vegetable Gardens: Different is Good](#)
- [British Columbia Man Faces 6 Months in Jail for Growing Food](#)
- [Toronto Changes City Ordinance: Front Yard Vegetable Gardens Now Legal](#)

UPDATE: Charges Dropped!

According to Mrs. Bass' [latest post on her blog](#), the misdemeanor charge against her for growing vegetables in her front yard has been dropped. Her attorney went to the courthouse earlier today to file a motion to dismiss the charges, and was told that the charges had already been dropped. However: the ordinance has not been changed, and Mrs. Bass still has her garden. We'll be keeping an eye on this story for further developments.

More on gardening

[Slideshow: Sustainable Garden Starter Kit: 10 Must-Have Products for the New Green Grower](#)

[How to Go Green: Gardening](#)

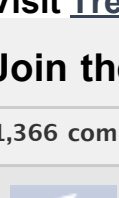
[Quiz: How Green is Your Garden?](#)

[Your Complete Guide to Summer Vegetable Gardening - Planet Green](#)

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Join the discussion!

1,366 comments



Comment using...

Grommitt Eckhart
Michelle Obama put 1100 sq.ft. of vegetable garden on the south lawn of the White House. If it's good enough for the leader of the free world, then what the f**k is wrong with Oakpark?

984 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 1:08pm

Grommitt Eckhart
If GW Bush could get involved with that unfortunate brain-dead woman in Florida, then why can't Ms. First Lady get involved in this? Does someone have her on Twitter?

96 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 1:31pm

John Russell Posson · E-5 Generator mechanic at Indiana Army National Guard
Here here, and again as i said in reply to a previous poster, TBH IMO a city should not be allowed to say you cant, provided you properly take care of it...

39 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 1:53pm

Julie Chippindale · Proston, Queensland
Michelle Obama may have been allowed to put a garden in but she was NOT allowed to say it was organic as others would then question why!!!!

37 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 2:43pm

[View 26 more](#)

Shelley Smith · Traditional Mysore-Style Ashtanga Yoga Instructor at Pineapple Yoga ☯️ Kauai
uh-oh. once people begin planting more VEGETABLES, they'll start getting HEALTHY too! good health could cause CLEAR THINKING, which might lead to AWARENESS of the source and impact of everyday food choices on both personal health and planet. awareness is likely to result in BREAKING ADDICTIONS to the toxic chemicals in processed foods and then REFUSING to purchase or consume the dangerous packaged/processed/GMO substances which are poisoning the average american eater every day. from there it's inevitable that the innocent vegetable planter will eventually be TRANSFORMED into a happier, healthier person supporting a happier, healthier planet AND will start to INFORM their friends and family about how they got that way, INSPIRING others to plant their own veggies too... (dangerous indeed, hmmm?)

544 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 3:55pm

Shelley Smith · Traditional Mysore-Style Ashtanga Yoga Instructor at Pineapple Yoga ☯️ Kauai
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99 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 3:56pm

Richard Hinsley · Works at Innovative, Inc.
Some truth to that!

8 · Like · Reply · July 9 at 9:57am

Ian Tracy
Word

6 · Like · Reply · July 9 at 10:10am

[View 20 more](#)

Steve Stoddard · Speed and Conditioning at Tree coach
maybe they're worried about terrorist hiding in the rutabagas.

257 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 11:39am

Gail Gruyters · Sault Sainte Marie, Ontario
LMAO! Best one I've heard all day. :D

10 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 10:41pm

Roo Kline · Lockyer District State High School
LOL!!! That really made me burst out laughing. Good one :)

5 · Like · Reply · July 9 at 10:28am

Marilyn Dehn Cotteus
I'm going out to check my rutabagas RIGHT NOW!!

38 · Like · Reply · July 9 at 2:19pm

[View 11 more](#)

Sue Keener · Daytona Beach, Florida
Instead of penalizing her, they should praise her for being a GOOD example: She's a model of self-sufficiently and sustainability that we can all learn from, especially during these difficult financial times. I wonder if the silly ordinances keep her from putting up a nice wooden fence around her front yard? I think code enforce needs to find more "useful" work for themselves - a.s.a.p!

217 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 12:44pm

Marshall Thompson · ★ Top Commenter · San Diego State University
Exactly!

4 · Like · Reply · Tuesday at 4:45pm

Lindsey Beth · Kutztown
i agree, she should find out if a fence is allowed, if so put one up and then no one can see the garden unless they are actually looking for themselves

1 · Like · Reply · Yesterday at 12:09pm

Maggie Volpo · Aquinas
And how is no one mentioning the obvious fact that 6 kids more than justify turning your entire yard into a garden? Yeesh. She could be feeding them McDonalds.

3 · Like · Reply · 12 hours ago

Milaine Grossbard · Stylist at Me
I cant believe that this is what they call and "eyesore" but kids being able to walk around the city of Oak park with there boxers hanging out and pants belt by the knees is allowed.Go figure!

126 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 12:09pm

Anita Brown-Batt
Unreal!

2 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 12:19pm

Shimra Greenes · Works at Freelance Graphic Designer and Illustrator
Go Julie! Seriously they bother her, when Jews were being attacked on Friday nights and they did nothing. The Federation had to get private help. What is wrong with Oak Park?

21 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 12:32pm

Michael Mottel Diskin · Michigan State University
The only problem I have is that she asked the city BEFORE she grew the garden and the city said no. She grew it anyway. I feel like if you don't want an answer, don't ask the question but once you ask you should abide by it or challenge it in proper channels not just simply ignore the answer you were given because you don't like it or don't agree with it.

63 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 12:35pm

[View 36 more](#)

Cherry Rose
Here in Denton we had a neighbor who's veggie garden took up the whole lot next to ours, and I loved it. What a waste of taxpayer dollars, and just another way for them to take away our autonomy. FOOD NOT LAWN!

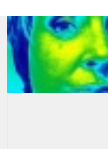
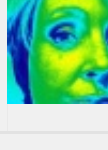


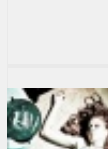
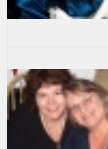
97 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 1:03pm

April Elizabeth
No kidding!

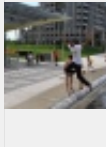

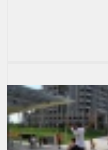
2 · Like · Reply · Monday at 10:32pm

Rachel Dawn Silva-Knepp · Academy of Art University

http://www.treehugger.com/files/2011/07/michigan_woman_faces_jail_planting_veggie_garden.php




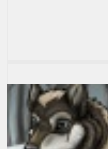
-  **lawns** are such a waste of space and water. although I guinea pigs do enjoy muching on ours
Like · Reply · Yesterday at 5:35pm
-  **Rachel Dawn Silva - Knepp** · Academy of Art University
oops I meant "our" guinea pigs..
Like · Reply · Yesterday at 5:35pm
-  **John Johns** · Manager at Ukiah, Tuesday Farmers Market
The city ordinance need to specify what exactly suitable mean before they ticket anybody.. Besides it's idiotic to be ticketed for a nice looking garden space like this..
👍 70 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 12:51pm
-  **Dikkins Little**
If some group would mount a legal fight I believe this ordinance is so vague as to be unenforceable. It doesn't even say who decides what is suitable nor WHAT is suitable.
👍 31 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 3:56pm
-  **Ashley Bennis** · Pizza Server at Pizza Papalis
Unconstitutionally vague it is.
👍 11 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 4:58pm
-  **Emette Lewis** · Mendocino College
um... food sounds like a suitable mean to me
👍 24 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 9:38pm

[View 4 more](#)

-  **Rahul Mehta** · University of Toronto
I'm going to go strawfower some sunflowers in my front yard right now! Take that crimefighters!
👍 59 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 1:23pm
-  **Daryn Guarino** · President at Zombie-Clean
Sunflowerist! This is the police. Come out of your garden with your hands up... Oh my god, he's got a watering can, repeat suspect has a watering can! Put it down, put it down! <BANG BANG BANG BANG>
👍 27 · Like · Reply · Tuesday at 11:55am
-  **Rahul Mehta** · University of Toronto
drat, sun-foiled again-
Time to hide in my brickbox, or perhaps my backyard :P
Like · Reply · Tuesday at 5:40pm

-  **Toni Tollefson - Wock** · OM(office manager) at Polson Animal Clinic
My Mother did the same thing to her front yard 30 years ago. Had some nasty comments from people as it was a touristy area and next to a motel. Well too bad, the tourists weren't putting food on her table. Plus it was more interesting to look at than the lawn.
👍 48 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 12:14pm
-  **Milla Koger**
It is unfortunate that the government imposes rules that violate our personal property rights.
👍 43 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 12:56pm
-  **Bogaerts Janine** · S.I.S.A.
It's a shame, I'm happy not living in the states...Its so exageraiting!
👍 5 · Like · Reply · July 9 at 2:17am
-  **Darci Baker - Henry**
I don't remember.... Mom didn't get fined or anything, did she? I remember the raised beds though--
👍 1 · Like · Reply · Tuesday at 4:59pm

[View 1 more](#)


-  **Vin Valluri** · Sustainability Manager at Labcon North America
The Land of Freedom never fails to surprise us with all its foxy fine print regulations, ordinances, and other tongue twisting "laws"..
👍 39 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 11:18am
-  **Ana Cecilia Piña** · Science Ambassador at University of Texas at Arlington
totally uncalled for, the neighbor was just jealous
👍 13 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 11:34am
-  **Vin Valluri** · Sustainability Manager at Labcon North America
Of all things, this issue is about local, sustainable, healthy living! Is that a crime???
-  **Road Wolf**
There is no fine print here though. It is all subject to a vague 'commonality' that people are supposed to understand. What laws like this fail to realize, is that people are common, but individuals can be uncommon and still be normal law-abiding citizens. If they wanted to outlaw gardens which have a purpose of providing food, rather than gardens that just look pretty, then they should of specified that 'no agricultural activities consisting of producing food be conducted in the front yard.' In my opinion it doesn't matter what a city rep said over the phone, if she read the laws and felt that she was in the right, then she should fight it.
👍 47 · Like · Reply · July 8 at 2:23pm

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Previous Discussion

 **SabrinaE**

Ugh, this is disturbing and contradicting. Why do all these other things in the media and laws and rules to make it so kids and people eat healthier, but yet if you want to grow your own veggies so you can be healthier (like society keeps shoving down u.s.a.'s throat), instead of paying for them thru commercial means, then you're committing a crime? I hope that makes sense. Im so angry about this right now, i might not make sense. But seriously? So what if she asked beforehand if she could plant veggies in her front yard and they said no? She is fighting that by actually growing the veggies, that is her fight. Lawns and flowers dont do anything for a living person to sustain them and veggies do. So why not put money towards making garden 'lawns' for people who want to have a garden? In my opinion, the front yard is no different from a back yard. People can still see in to your back yard, including neighbors, so thats a poor excuse. Also, if it is her property, she pays taxes and/or mortgage or whatever, who has the right to tell you what to do on your home. Thats like saying the inside of our houses can only be decorated certain ways. Its the same thing, inside and outside is part of your property, so do with it what you will, especially if you're the one paying for it and not getting money from loans or grants or gift money to create the garden. I hope ive made my point clear enough to understand. Gosh this really frustrates me.

5 days ago 40 Likes [Like](#)

 **D-MLeviHome**

Please let us know when the march on city hall will take place. I wanna' be there (along with about 100,000 of my best "Friends")!

5 days ago 27 Likes [Like](#)

 **Arrdvarks**

Ugly pine boxes. Definety not attractive. Paint or stain the boxes to blend with the landscaping. Since it is not n upscale community the neighbors should be forced to look at this mess. Til the land and use a less ugly border. Thank god communities have standards. I would not want to look at this mess.

3 days ago 15 Likes [Like](#)

 **FoodsNotWrong**

Paint is pretty and pine is ugly?

If you don't want to look, and the choices are: 1. Don't Look or 2. Restrict Personal Property Rights Arbitrarily Across the Board, I presume that any good Fascist would choose option 2.

Thanks for chiming in in favor of government intrusion and against personal expression.

10 hours ago in reply to Arrdvarks 1 Like [Like](#)

 **HF**

This should get us moving to remove ALL Oak Park government officials including the prosecutor and Judge if the judge rules against this woman. Do we have the balls that the Egyptians and Tunisians had in overthrowing tyrannical government officials?

2 days ago 11 Likes [Like](#)

 **Dngremaud**

I've gardened for years, landscape gardening in the front yard and vegetable/food gardening in the backyard. Admittedly, the city ordinance seems too vague to be enforced in this situation, but I feel the wording should be made more precise. I'm a tree-hugger also, but corn, watermelon, bush beans etc. don't generally lend themselves to curb appeal or a pleasing streetscape that is in the entire community's interest.

1 day ago 6 Likes [Like](#)

 **FoodsNotWrong**

How is enforced conformity at the risk of jail in the community's best interest? How is the squandering of civic resources (water) on monoculture of lawn more in the community's interest than the raising of fresh, healthy food and resulting retention in the community of \$ which would have left the community for agribusiness-produced food trucked hundreds or thousands of miles with resulting pollution and energy waste?

On what basis can you claim that 4 square feet of strawberry plants are less pleasing to view than 4 square feet of close-cut grass?

One can personally, subjectively dislike a neighbor expresses herself and still be willing to fight for her right to do so.

I can't help wondering how many "small government" TeaBaggers are rooting for the side of government intrusion here.

10 hours ago in reply to Dngremaud 1 Like [Like](#)

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